



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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Prepared for

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Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**

**Hearing Entitled  
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Chairman Grijalva, Representative Bishop, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Kevin Simpson, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing the federal civil service by inspiring a new generation to serve and transforming the way the federal government works. We are honored to be here today to discuss morale at the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service (NPS). In our testimony, we will comment on the efforts of these agencies to improve recruitment, retention and overall employee satisfaction, and will suggest areas which we believe would benefit most from this subcommittee's attention.

The Partnership has two principal areas of focus. First, we work to inspire new talent to join federal service. Second, we work with government leaders to help transform government so that the best and brightest will enter, stay and succeed in meeting the challenges of our nation. That includes all aspects of how the federal government manages people, from attracting them to government, leading and engaging them, supporting their development and managing performance; in short, all the essential ingredients for creating, developing and maintaining a world-class workforce.

### **A New Opportunity**

On the eve of the Presidential election in November 2008, the Partnership conducted a poll with Gallup on public perceptions of the federal government.<sup>1</sup> The research confirmed that most Americans continue to think poorly of their government in general. When asked to assess the performance of various levels of government, less than one-third of Americans gave a positive rating to the departments and agencies of the federal government (27 percent) and just over one-third were positive about the performance of civil servants in the federal government (37 percent).

While the general public lacked confidence in government, there were a few positive signs – and one of them was the national parks. Survey respondents were asked to rate the job that the federal government was doing on different issues. With respect to “running the country’s national parks,” 51 percent said they thought the federal government was doing a “good/excellent” job, while 36 percent said “fair/poor” job and 13 percent said they didn’t know. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM need to capitalize on this public support for the work of government in managing our parks and public lands, and Congress must ensure that these agencies have the human resources they need to maintain and protect the natural resources that so many Americans treasure.

With the election and subsequent inauguration of President Obama, there has been a renewed interest in government service. Agencies need to capitalize on these changing attitudes and work hard to recruit, engage and retain top talent in service to the American people.

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<sup>1</sup> *In the Public We Trust: Renewing the Connection between the Federal Government and the Public.* Partnership for Public Service and Gallup, November 2008.

In his inauguration speech, President Obama said it well: “The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works.” As the new administration begins to settle in, we urge the President and Congress to focus not just on policy objectives but also on ensuring that our government has the talented and engaged federal workforce that it needs to effectively implement those policies.

The Partnership issued a report last year entitled “Roadmap to Reform: A Management Framework for the Next Administration.”<sup>2</sup> In our report, we suggest that the core components of an effective workforce include having the right talent; an engaged workforce; strong leadership; and, public support. This is true for government as a whole, and it is true for the departments and agencies of government – including the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management. The Partnership is pleased to provide you with some insight into the human capital challenges facing these agencies and suggest some areas in which your oversight and legislative attention would have the most impact.

### **Measures Drive Change**

The old adage that “what gets measured, gets changed” still holds true. And when it comes to the federal workforce, not enough is getting fully measured. Data available on the state of the federal workforce is not systematically organized, evaluated or disseminated in a way that is meaningful to all of the key audiences.

The value of indicator systems as an effective tool for driving reform has been widely documented. The Partnership has taken a step toward creating national indicators through our *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings, prepared in collaboration with American University’s Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation. The *Best Places* rankings build upon data from the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) to provide a comprehensive assessment of employee satisfaction across the federal government’s agencies and their subcomponents.

Employee satisfaction and commitment are two of the necessary ingredients in developing high-performing organizations and attracting needed talent to meet our nation’s challenges. The *Best Places to Work* rankings are a key step in recognizing the importance of employee satisfaction and ensuring that it is a top priority of government managers and leaders.

Since the first rankings were released in 2003, they have helped create much-needed institutional incentives to focus on priority workforce issues and provide managers and leaders with a roadmap for boosting employee engagement.

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<sup>2</sup> *Roadmap to Reform: A Management Framework for the Next Administration*. Partnership for Public Service, October 2008.

The rankings also provide Members of Congress and the general public with unprecedented insight into federal agencies and what the people who work in those agencies say about leadership, mission and effectiveness. Ideally, the *Best Places* rankings can aid Congress in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities by highlighting the federal government's high-performing agencies and raising a red flag when agencies suffer from conditions that lead to low employee engagement and, consequently, poor performance.

## **A Look at Employee Engagement**

The Partnership recently received the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey data from OPM for agency subcomponents so we are in the process of preparing our 2009 *Best Places* rankings. Although the rankings will not be calculated and released until later this spring, we can discuss the 2007 rankings and are able to preview some important findings for the subcommittee drawn from the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey. Additionally, we can provide some trend data for the subcomponents based on Survey data from 2002-2008.

In 2007, the Partnership ranked 30 large agencies, 31 small agencies and 222 agency subcomponents. Our index scores are computed based on data that comes from federal employees themselves through their responses to OPM's Federal Human Capital Survey. As part of the rankings, we organize the data into ten key workplace categories which are all key drivers of employee satisfaction: employee skills/mission match, leadership, work/life balance, teamwork, pay and benefits, training and development, support for diversity, strategic management, performance-based rewards and advancement, and family-friendly culture and benefits.

In the 2007 *Best Places* ranking, the Department of Agriculture, of which the Forest Service is a part, ranked 17 out of 30 large agencies. The Department of the Interior, which includes NPS and BLM, ranked 22 out of 30. All three agency subcomponents received rankings comparable to other subcomponents in their respective departments; however, they all ranked in the bottom half when compared to the total 222 agency subcomponents. The Forest Service ranked 143 out of 222 subcomponents, NPS ranked 160 out of 222 subcomponents, and BLM ranked 157 out of 222 subcomponents. After a preliminary review of the 2008 FHCS data, we expect to see modest improvements in the 2009 *Best Places* rankings for NPS and BLM; however we predict that the Forest Service's ranking will drop. At the Forest Service, we see a downward trend in the 2008 FHCS responses to key questions that reflect overall employee satisfaction:

- Fifty-six percent of employees surveyed say they would recommend their organization as a good place to work, which is a decline from 61 percent two years ago;
- Sixty-two percent say they are satisfied with their job, also a decline from 70 percent in 2006;

- Only 44 percent say they are satisfied with their organization, down from 51 percent.

Results such as these suggest that something is not going right at the Forest Service. Clearly, there is much work to be done to improve employee morale and engagement in all three agencies and the Forest Service in particular may have greater hurdles to overcome.

It is encouraging to note that the agencies we are discussing today have one prominent thing in common – employees are attracted by the mission of their organization and believe their jobs are a good match for their skills. More than 80 percent of employees at the Forest Service, NPS and BLM say that they like the kind of work they do. There is a decline at the Forest Service from 88 percent in 2006 to 83.5 percent in 2008, which is notable, but the numbers are still high. NPS responses have remained relatively stable over time and the BLM has increased slightly, from 82.9 percent in 2006 to 84.5 in 2008. All three subcomponents compare favorably with the private sector benchmark of 83 percent. Agency leaders, both at headquarters and in the field, should continue to focus on the mission and help employees understand the connection between the work they are doing and broader organizational goals.

In terms of areas for improvement, the number one driver of employee satisfaction in all three agencies according to the 2007 *Best Places* rankings is leadership, and we expect this will continue to be the case in the 2009 rankings. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM will need to make a concerted effort to address leadership. Improving employee perceptions of their leaders will have the most impact on employee engagement.

The Federal Human Capital Survey includes several questions regarding employee perceptions of leadership in the workplace. In 2008, the survey results for the three agencies we are discussing today are notably low – far below the government-wide average – for virtually every question about effective leadership. Responses are particularly low for the questions on whether leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce and whether complaints, disputes or grievances are resolved fairly in their work unit. Only 27 percent of respondents at the Forest Service say their leaders generate high levels of motivation. The National Park Service and BLM do not fare much better with just slightly higher scores of 29.6 percent and 30 percent respectively. With regard to the way complaints, disputes and grievances are resolved in the workplace, 32.7 percent of employees at the Forest Service, 34.9 percent at NPS and 34.6 percent at BLM feel they are handled well. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior also receive low marks from employees on both of these questions, which suggest that leadership needs to be addressed at the Department level, as well.

Similarly, scores reveal that a majority of employees do not have a high level of respect for senior leaders in their organization, do not believe their leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity, do not feel empowered with respect to work processes and do not feel satisfied with the information received from management about what is going on in the organization. At the Forest Service, for example, only 37 percent of

respondents believe they have sufficient information as compared to 66 percent in the private sector benchmark, which is a substantial difference. On a more positive note, 66 percent of respondents at the Forest Service believe that their immediate supervisor/team leader is doing a good job, which is the government-wide average. Despite the good news about supervisors, all three agencies still fall below the private sector comparison of 74 percent. These data points combine to tell an unfortunate tale about the state of leadership in our public lands agencies.

In addition to leadership, there are other key areas where the Forest Service, NPS and BLM need to focus their attention. According to the 2008 FHCS data, it appears that the agencies are still struggling to cultivate a work environment with a positive work/life balance. On the one hand, survey respondents strongly believe that their supervisors support their need to balance work and other life issues. This is one of the areas where the Forest Service gets the highest marks. Eight-two percent of respondents believe their supervisor supports a healthy work/life balance. On the other hand, it is clear that Forest Service respondents do not believe that they have sufficient resources (e.g., people, materials, budget) to accomplish their jobs. Only 32.5 percent of respondents say they have sufficient resources, a drop from 39 percent in 2004. The government-wide average is 51.2 percent. The Bureau of Land Management (41.6 percent) and National Park Service (35.3 percent) do not fare much better but their scores have improved slightly since 2006. Clearly this question of resources is one area that warrants further attention from the agencies and from Congress.

According to the *Best Places* rankings, strategic management is another key driver of employee engagement. When asked the question “my work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills” on the 2008 FHCS, the scores are low for BLM and NPS and are particularly low for the Forest Service. Only 35.3 percent of survey respondents from the Forest Service believe their work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills. The scores for BLM and NPS are both 41 percent, which is still lower than the government-wide average of 45 percent.

In general, employees at the Forest Service, NPS and BLM believe that the workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals. The scores are relatively high and range from 71 percent (BLM) to 66 percent (Forest Service); however, the same employees do not give high marks for the question on whether the skill level in their work unit has improved in the past year. We do know that satisfaction with regard to training has increased at both NPS and BLM. This suggests that an increased investment in this area by the Department of the Interior is noted and appreciated by employees. On the other hand, satisfaction with training has decreased at the Forest Service. In 2006, 63 percent said they were satisfied with training, well above the government-wide average of 54 percent. Now, two years later, only 55 percent say they are satisfied with training.

Taken together, the results from the 2007 *Best Places* rankings and the trend data from the FHCS convey the sense of a public lands workforce that is under stress. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM are fortunate to have workforces that are highly committed to

their respective missions and who generally believe their immediate supervisors are doing a good job. But these are also workforces who say they lack the resources to do the job required of them, that their agencies do not excel in recruiting new talent with needed skills, that their leaders fail to inspire and motivate high performance, and that the skill level of the agencies is stagnant. We can say with confidence that an under-resourced, under-trained workforce will not be able to perform at its best on behalf of the American people.

Congress and the Administration need to work together to ensure that adequate resources are available. This includes making sure that agencies are using all of the tools at their disposal to recruit, retain and develop talent; ensuring the resources are available to use these tools effectively; addressing leadership issues and cultivating new leaders; and, investing in training and support for supervisors/managers to ensure that they are able to effectively manage a diverse workforce which includes many seasonal and part-time employees.

Since a significant percentage of the workforce at BLM, NPS and the Forest Service are not full-time permanent employees, Congress should encourage agencies to do regular “pulse check” surveys that include part-time, temporary and volunteer workers. These groups are not included in the FHCS but are an important population, and their performance directly affects the ability of these agencies to fulfill their missions.

In addition, better and more frequent data are essential for Congress to conduct necessary oversight of the Forest Service, NPS and BLM and how they are managing their workforces. We recommend that OPM conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey on an annual basis, and release the data as soon as its accuracy can be assured. This will enable the agencies to make real-time course corrections where needed; provide an annual benchmark capability by providing consistent data across agency lines; and provide Congress a more timely and informative oversight tool.

### *NPS Case Study*

Last summer, at the request of the National Parks Conservation Association, the Partnership conducted an analysis of employee satisfaction and engagement at the National Park Service. The Partnership conducted a trend analysis for NPS using FHCS data from 2002-2006. The trend analysis informed a subsequent set of focus groups of NPS employees conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. in fall 2008. The Partnership has recently issued a set of recommendations for how NPS might improve leadership. Many of these recommendations can be applied to Forest Service and BLM, as well.

First, the Partnership recommended that NPS work to engage leadership. Senior leaders need to understand the importance of having an engaged workforce and clearly make improving employee engagement a priority. We recommended that NPS leadership meet as a team to determine priorities around improving engagement. New political appointees, particularly the next Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks and

his or her key staff, should be included as soon as – and to the maximum extent – possible.

Effective communication begins at the top of the organization. Employees need to hear from NPS leaders that employee engagement is a priority.

- First, we recommended that leaders send emails, convene town hall meetings and spread the word through other communication channels that improving employee engagement is a key goal for NPS leaders.
- Second, we suggested that leaders share the summary findings of the FHCS and then focus on group results with employees – the good, the bad and the ugly.
- Third, we urged NPS to communicate leadership’s top areas or issues for improvement and periodically follow up with employees through progress reports.
- Finally, we recommended that NPS leaders ask for input on specific issues and then use that employee feedback (e.g., ask employees: how can we better use our limited resources to achieve our mission?).

Leaders also need to foster effective communication from the bottom up. Employees need to know that they are heard and that their opinions and perspectives matter. Leaders should provide additional avenues for upward communication; for example, a virtual employee suggestion box, short pulse surveys, or town hall meetings. Employees should be encouraged to provide input on projects and should be consulted on how to improve processes. It is important that employees are heard and that senior leaders follow up on suggestions.

Developing strong supervisors and managers must be a priority for NPS leadership. NPS leaders should consider conducting 360-degree reviews of supervisors or create a mentoring program to help them develop. Leaders should also select supervisors based on an individual’s management and leadership skills, rather than simply technical expertise. It makes sense to create a dual track for those technical experts, which will allow them to be compensated and recognized for their skills and abilities without requiring them to become supervisors.

Finally, it is important that NPS leaders, as well as supervisors/managers conduct regular, meaningful performance discussions and provide guidance for how employees can improve and build upon strengths. Leaders are also encouraged to recognize and reward employees’ good work through a simple “thank you,” additional time off, spot awards or other methods.

### **Attracting New Talent**

The good news is that the federal government is an attractive employer, whether it is for young people graduating from college or older Americans considering encore careers. Our January 2009 report, “Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It,” surveyed almost 32,000 American



undergraduates about what they are looking for in an employer.<sup>3</sup> We found that government/public service is the most popular industry choice out of 46 career options among the undergraduates surveyed. A healthy work/life balance was the number one career goal, with 66 percent of students citing this as a priority; 46 percent of students say they want to be dedicated to a cause or feel they are serving a greater good.

Older workers also find the federal government to be an attractive employer. The Partnership published a report in January, 2008, entitled “A Golden Opportunity: Recruiting Baby Boomers Into Government.”<sup>4</sup> As part of the report, we surveyed older workers and found that 58 percent believed “there are good jobs for people like me in the federal government.” When asked what job qualities they found most appealing, respondents cited work that is interesting and challenging and offers health care benefits, both of which the government offers.

Tapping into this interest in federal service is essential to ensuring that the Forest Service, NPS and BLM have the human resources needed to meet their responsibilities; indeed, the federal government as a whole needs to attract new talent at all levels. The Partnership projects that more than 500,000 full-time permanent federal employees will leave government over the next five years, the majority through retirement. This exodus of talent will create huge voids that will need to be filled.

The three agencies we are discussing today have significant hiring needs. In 2008 alone, the agencies made the following new hires:

- Forest Service: 1,148 full-time, permanent and 12,548 full-time, temporary;
- Park Service: 590 full-time, permanent and 8,905 full-time, temporary;
- Bureau of Land Management: 550 full-time, permanent and 2,509 full-time, temporary.

According to the USAJOBS Web site, on March 12, 2009, there were over 1,400 job openings being advertised at the National Park Service, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management combined. The largest number, 594 vacancies, were at the Bureau of Land Management. The Forest Service had 436 vacancies and NPS had 385. These positions run the gamut from Fire Management Officer to Park Ranger to Biological Science Technician, and are located all across the country. A significant number of these vacancies are temporary, seasonal positions.

It’s likely this level of hiring will continue and perhaps increase into at least the near future given that the Recovery Act includes \$146 million for the NPS, \$125 million for BLM, and \$650 million for the Forest Service. Further, the President’s proposed FY 2010 budget calls for a \$100 million increase in park operations (plus inflation) and a \$50 million increase (plus inflation) for national forest operations, among other initiatives

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<sup>3</sup> *Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It.* Partnership for Public Service and Universum, January 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *A Golden Opportunity: Recruiting Baby Boomers Into Government.* Partnership for Public Service, January 2008.

likely to impact on hiring needs in both agencies. Clearly this is a time to focus on efforts to improve the federal government's ability to effectively attract and hire some of the nation's best talent for the jobs to be filled.

A short visit to the USAJOBS Web site shows quite clearly that federal hiring procedures are inconsistent and not designed with a positive applicant experience in mind. In one vacancy announcement for a "Park Ranger (I)" at the National Park Service, the information under the "how to apply" tab was nine pages long. Some applications may be submitted online; others ask applicants to send applications via U.S. Mail. Some job announcements provide the name of a point of contact; others cite the general phone number for the human resources office. One of the most common requirements across government is that applicants answer several essay questions to address "KSAs" – knowledge, skills and abilities – a time consuming task that discourages many of even the most qualified people from applying. Those motivated enough to complete the application process find that it is just the beginning; some wait months before receiving a response. It is no wonder that many potential candidates for federal positions conclude that it is simply not worth the effort to apply.

While we cannot comment on the specific hiring practices of the Forest Service, BLM and NPS, we can say that government as a whole needs to improve its ability to hire the right talent, with the right skills, in a timely manner. The Subcommittee would be well-served to review the hiring processes at the three agencies we are discussing today to determine whether our public lands agencies are indeed hiring as effectively as they could be. The Partnership would like to offer some general recommendations with regard to recruiting and hiring new talent.

- 1) First, we suggest that Congress pass legislation creating a "Federal Applicant's Bill of Rights."<sup>5</sup> An applicant bill of rights should provide that the hiring process must be understandable, transparent and timely. Job announcements should be written in plain English. In most cases, applicants should be able to apply online with a standard resume, and should be able to reach a real person at the agency to which they are applying if they have questions. Agencies should be held accountable for making timely hiring decisions, and notifying applicants when a hire has been made.

We also suggest that Congress require better data collection from federal agencies regarding their hiring effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> This subcommittee needs more and better information from the agencies you oversee regarding their ability to hire and retain needed talent. Measures of hiring effectiveness should include an understanding of where the agencies are getting their talent, whether that talent is diverse, whether managers are satisfied with the match between the skills of newly hired individuals and the needs of their agencies, and whether qualified applicants accept positions elsewhere due to the length or complexity of federal

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<sup>5</sup> See Applicant's Bill of Rights draft legislative language in Appendix I.

<sup>6</sup> The Partnership suggests "Measures for Federal Hiring Effectiveness" in Section 3 of the draft "Federal Applicant's Bill of Rights" in Appendix I.

hiring. It is also important to collect data on the temporary, seasonal and part-time employees who comprise a significant part of our nation's public lands workforce.

- 2) Agencies should prioritize student internships as key talent sources for entry-level jobs and then recruit accordingly and resource these programs adequately. They should also make greater use of the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) because these internships are designed to enable agencies to convert the most promising students into permanent employees. Managers should have greater flexibility to hire students from all internship programs who have demonstrated their capabilities. Congress should require agencies to evaluate their intern programs and ensure agencies are making the best use of their authority to build their critical workforce pipelines.

Other agencies can learn from the Bureau of Land Management, which will be highlighted in a future Partnership report on federal student internship programs. The agency hired a student coordinator to oversee the National Student Employment Programs, Presidential Management Fellows Program and Federal Career Intern program. The coordinator develops standardized procedures, sets expectations across the agency and maintains a resume databank that hiring managers can tap. She also conducts monthly conference calls with student employment program coordinators in all 16 states in which BLM operates, which allows for the sharing of best practices for recruiting students and ultimately converting them to full-time permanent employees. BLM also developed an entire online training program with modules applicable for student program coordinators, hiring managers and supervisors as well as students.

These efforts have been paying off. There are roughly 200 SCEP interns with the BLM each year. About one-third receive special incentives from the Washington, D.C. office in the form of tuition support (\$2,000/year for in-state and \$3,000/year for out-of-state) plus travel to and from job duty stations. These incentives are geared towards enhancing the retention of underrepresented populations such as women and racial minorities in the BLM's locations in the western states and lead to conversion rates of about 80 percent among those receiving the incentives.

- 3) Congress should encourage agencies to continue to take advantage of existing recruitment incentives, such as student loan repayment, and should provide resources necessary for them to do so. Congress should also require agencies to report on the use and effectiveness of different recruitment incentives in an effort to determine the most effective way to recruit and retain talent.

According to OPM's 2007 Federal Student Loan Repayment Program Report to Congress, the Department of the Interior provided nearly \$400,000 in loan repayment to 41 individuals in positions including Park Ranger, Land Surveyor and Facilities and Operations Management Specialists, among others. The Department of the Interior cited the value of using this student loan repayment

program as a way to help individual bureaus attract key talent in fields such as engineering, environmental science, telecommunication and financial analysis. The Department of Agriculture also provided just over \$400,000 in loan repayment to 53 employees spread across all components of the agency. Again, the agency reported that the student loan repayment program was a valuable recruitment and retention tool.<sup>7</sup>

- 4) Finally, the Partnership suggests that Congress pass Representative David Price's *Roosevelt Scholars Act*, a measure that could help the agencies – and the rest of the federal government – meet some of their critical hiring needs. Named after President Theodore Roosevelt, who championed the creation and expansion of national parks and monuments, the legislation creates a graduate-level scholarship program in mission-critical fields in exchange for a federal service commitment. The program could help agencies recruit new engineers, biologists, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialists, and other high-need professionals. The military's ROTC program has been a tremendous source of leadership talent for our nation's armed forces; we believe the *Roosevelt Scholars Act* could become an analogous source of needed expertise for our civilian agencies. The *Roosevelt Scholars Act* was introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress and is expected to be introduced again shortly.

In summary, the Obama administration has ushered in an era of enthusiasm for government service not seen since the Kennedy years; now our government must seize the opportunity to build new pipelines of talent into government and improve management of our current federal workforce. It is critical that agencies streamline their hiring processes, build robust internship programs that can serve as a pipeline of talent, and utilize existing hiring authorities and recruitment incentives to recruit the best and brightest talent. Congress should require that agencies collect metrics to enable agencies to understand what hiring authorities and incentives are most effective in recruiting and retaining needed expertise.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

The Partnership offers the following recommendations for attracting talent, improving morale and enhancing overall employee satisfaction and engagement at the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management:

- Leadership at the Forest Service, NPS, and BLM should make improving employee satisfaction and engagement a priority. Leaders should also focus on improving horizontal and vertical communication and fostering opportunities for employee input.
- Supervisors should be selected based on leadership/management skills, not just technical expertise. Congress should support agencies in creating a dual track for

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<sup>7</sup> Federal Student Loan Repayment Program Report to Congress, Office of Personnel Management, 2007.

technical experts, allowing them to be compensated and recognized for their skills and abilities without the necessity of becoming supervisors.

- Congress should ensure that agencies have the resources and personnel necessary to fulfill their missions. This includes setting aside funding for training and leadership development.
- Congress should encourage agencies to do regular “pulse check” surveys that include part-time, temporary and volunteer workers. These groups are not included in the FHCS but are an important population, and their attitudes/perceptions about the workplace will contribute greatly to overall morale.
- Congress should require the Office of Personnel Management to conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) on an annual basis, and release the data as soon as its accuracy can be assured. This will enable the agencies to make real-time course corrections where needed; provide an annual benchmark capability by providing consistent data across agency lines; and provide Congress a more timely and informative oversight tool. This will also save each department and agency the time and cost associated with complying with the annual employee survey requirement in the year that OPM does not conduct the FHCS.
- Congress should require all federal agencies and their subcomponents to adopt a “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights” to make the application process more user-friendly and the hiring process more timely and transparent.
- Congress should encourage agencies to take advantage of existing hiring authorities and recruitment incentives and should provide resources necessary for them to do so. Congress should also ask agencies to collect metrics to assess how they are using these personnel flexibilities and recruitment incentives, and what is most effective in recruiting, engaging, and ultimately retaining diverse and highly qualified talent. Agencies should also report on how these flexibilities and incentives can be improved.
- Congress should require additional measures of hiring effectiveness to determine whether BLM, NPS, the Forest Service and other federal agencies are able to recruit and hire enough of the right people with the right skills.
- Agencies should prioritize student internships as key talent sources for entry-level jobs and then recruit accordingly and resource these programs adequately. Congress should require agencies to evaluate their intern programs in this context to ensure agencies are making the best use of their authority to build their critical workforce pipelines.
- Congress should pass the *Roosevelt Scholars Act* to help agencies recruit mission-critical talent.

## **Appendix I**

(7/8/08 draft)

### **Section 1. Short Title.**

This Act may be cited as the “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights Act of 2008”.

### **Section 2. Standards for Federal Hiring.**

(a) Clarity of job announcements. – Federal job announcements shall be written in plain English, with a minimum of acronyms or jargon, and shall clearly and prominently display the title, salary, location, work schedule, type and duration of appointment, responsibilities of the position and instructions for applying.

(b) User-friendly application process. – Federal agencies shall keep the amount of initial information required from an applicant to the minimum necessary to determine qualifications and eligibility. On-line receipt of a standard resume and a brief response to questions regarding citizenship and veteran status may serve as application for employment except in special circumstances as determined by the head of an agency. Submission of additional material in support of an application, such as college transcripts, proof of veteran status, and professional certifications, may be required only when necessary to complete the application process and applicants shall be given a reasonable amount of time after the closing date of the job announcement to provide such information.

(c) Timely communication and online tracking. -- [Federal agencies/OPM] shall devise and implement a means by which applicants for federal jobs (1) receive prompt acknowledgement of their application, (2) be given or have on-line access to periodic updates on the status of their application, and (3) may speak to an appropriate individual at an agency regarding the hiring process or their application for employment.

(d) Timely decision and candidate notification. – Federal agencies shall make timely hiring decisions. Within ten business days of the time that selected candidates have accepted offers of employment or job announcements have been canceled, non-selected job applicants will be notified.

### **Section 3. Measures of Federal Hiring Effectiveness.**

(a) Pursuant to subsection (b), federal agencies shall measure and collect data on a continuous basis and report to the Office of Personnel Management on the following indicators of hiring effectiveness:

#### **(1) Recruiting and Hiring —**

- (A) ability to reach and recruit well-qualified talent from diverse talent pools;
- (B) use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit most qualified applicants;
- (C) use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit diverse candidates, including veteran, minority and disabled candidates;
- (D) data on the age, educational level, and source of applicants;
- (E) length of time elapsed between the time a position is advertised and the time a first offer of employment is made;

- (F) length of time elapsed between the time a first offer of employment is made and the time a new hire starts in that position;
- (G) number of internal and external applicants for federal positions;
- (2) Hiring Manager Assessment—
  - (A) manager satisfaction with the quality of new hires;
  - (B) manager satisfaction with the match between the skills of newly hired individuals and the needs of the agency;
  - (C) manager satisfaction with the hiring process and hiring outcomes;
- (3) Applicant Assessment —
  - (A) applicant satisfaction with the hiring process (including clarity of job announcement, user-friendliness of the application process, communication regarding status of application and timeliness of hiring decision);
  - (B) mission-critical gaps closed by new hires and the connection between mission-critical gaps and annual agency performance;
  - (C) number of people who withdraw from consideration or accept other positions due mainly to the length or complexity of the federal hiring process;
- (4) Onboarding—
  - (A) new hire satisfaction with the onboarding experience (including welcoming and orientation processes, becoming familiar with new work unit and job responsibilities, being provided with timely and useful new employee information and assistance, and assignment of meaningful work);
  - (B) new hire attrition;
  - (C) investment in training and development for new employees during their first year of employment;
- (5) Other indicators and measures as required by the Office of Personnel Management.
- (b) The measures of hiring effectiveness established under subsection (a) may be augmented or adjusted over time as the Office of Personnel Management deems necessary for improving the data available on hiring effectiveness.
- (c) The Office of Personnel Management shall issue regulations within 180 days of the enactment of this Act directing the methodology, timing and reporting of the data described in subsection (a).
- (d) The Office of Personnel Management shall make the data reported under subsection (a) available to the public online on a quarterly basis and in a consistent format to allow for a comparison of hiring effectiveness and experience across demographic groups and federal agencies.
- (e) Before publicly releasing data as described in subsection (d), the Office of Personnel Management shall provide the data in a consistent format to OPM-certified non-profit organizations upon request for purposes of research on hiring practices and hiring effectiveness.

#### Section 4. Annual Federal Human Capital Survey.

- (a) In General. – The Office of Personnel Management shall conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey of federal employees on an annual basis.<sup>8</sup>
- (b) Each federal agency shall reimburse the Office of Personnel Management for the cost of conducting the Federal Human Capital Survey in that agency.
- (c) The Office of Personnel Management shall make the data reported under subsection (a) available to the public online in a timely manner [by a date certain] and in a consistent format to allow for a comparison of hiring effectiveness across demographic groups and federal agencies.
- (d) Before publicly releasing data as described in subsection (c), the Office of Personnel Management shall provide the data in a consistent format to OPM-certified non-profit organizations upon request for purposes of research on hiring practices and hiring effectiveness.

#### Section 5. Authorization of Appropriations.

- (a) In General. – There are authorized to be appropriated, in fiscal year 2009 and each subsequent fiscal year, such sums as may be necessary for the Office of Personnel Management to meet the requirements of this Act.

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<sup>8</sup> OPM conducts the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) on a biennial basis, though OPM is not required to do so by law. This provision would make the FHCS a statutory requirement.